

EXCELLENCE FOR ALL
MONTANA INITIATIVE FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
STATE IMPROVEMENT GRANT
2003

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three major purposes focused the design of this project. First, the project focused on aligning activities and practices within general and special education to create a coherent and unified agenda of school improvement in Montana. We use *Excellence for ALL*, the project's title, to communicate this intent. The second purpose of this project is to target specific areas of need unique to the delivery of services to students with disabilities, creating new partnerships, approaches, and solutions to improve outcomes in areas known to be in need of improvement. Third, recognizing a sufficient quantity of trained personnel who utilize practices that are known to be associated with successful student outcomes is necessary to ensure quality services for students, this project targets challenges that Montana faces in the areas of personnel preparation, recruitment, retention, and professional development.

The primary goals of the grant include:

GOAL 1: STANDARDS-BASED REFORM. Personnel and policy-makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at state and local levels.

GOAL 2: OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. General and special educators, families, and other agencies supporting young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve transition planning for students with disabilities.

GOAL 3: PERSONNEL RETENTION/RECRUITMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

Within all three initiatives of this project, there are specific areas of systems change or improvement that have occurred. These outcomes represent substantial and significant accomplishments on the road toward improved outcomes for *all* students. In the area of standards-based reform, students with disabilities are being included in the state systems of standards and accountability. Districts, then, account for that information in their district five-year planning processes. The creation of a unified management information system is complete relative to academic achievement of students and personnel data. A fully developed coordinated information system is not feasible under the parameters of the SIG grant. However, we have an approved supervision enhancement grant in place to pursue this project. Concerning outcomes for students with disabilities, interagency collaboration and resource sharing will support transition outcomes, as well as mental health needs. Regional CSPD councils continue to actively assist in promoting improved student outcomes through ongoing regionally responsive professional development. In the area of personnel retention/recruitment and professional development, more varied opportunities for specialization and ongoing professional development are available to general and special education teachers through the collaborative efforts of the OPI and the state's Institutions of Higher Education (IHE). Collaborative cross-state partnerships are in place to reduce personnel needs in fields of related services and other agreements are in development. Interagency collaboration has created options for preservice and professional development for those working within the field of early intervention.

Information regarding SIG projects is enclosed.